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Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Eden Fritz Aguiar and I am from Wethersfield, CT. I am a senior at Eastern Connecticut State University and will be graduating in May with a bachelor's degree in communication. As a student who is completing her undergraduate degree in three years, most of my college education has been plagued by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Like many Americans and students within the Connecticut State University System, the pandemic has complicated my college career. During this time, I've worked two to three part time jobs at a time in order to pay my tuition installments and other bills. Money has been tight, especially with the recent tuition increases due to the dire need for funding of our institutions.

Somedays, I work 15 or more hours straight in order to afford the cost of living and my education. Like many of my peers, I have been incredibly grateful for the HERFF grants we have received. These grants have helped my financial stress, so I am able to focus more on school than trying to figure out how many hours I need to work, at the minimum, in order to have enough for my monthly installments and other basic necessities.

At the start of this school year, my laptop stopped working. As a communication major who has a concentration in applied media production, this couldn't have come at a worse time. For two months, I didn't have a laptop. I would borrow my friend's laptops or plan around classes to work on school computers in labs or the library in order to complete assignments. Then, a HERFF grant was provided around November, and I was able to buy a new laptop.

During the winter break from school, many of my friends discussed their fun vacation plans while mine consisted of working at my jobs over break. However, COVID-19 had other plans. Right before the New Year, I tested positive for COVID-19 and was unable to work for over two weeks. While I should've been resting, I was more worried about finding coverage at work and how I'd be able to afford my installments, which have increased this semester due to the need for funding.

While this may be the story of one undergraduate student, I can't begin to imagine how many students are in a similar situation as I am. In a time where minimum wage does not meet the rate of living, funding for our higher education institutions is needed more than ever. Bankrate conducted a telephone survey of more than 1,000 adults in early January that showed that 56% of Americans are unable to cover an unexpected \$1,000 bill with savings. With percentages like this, it makes me worry how many of my peers are also in this situation. It also makes me wonder how a HERFF grant and further funding for our higher education institutions could change a student's life.

Thank you to the distinguished members for your time, we appreciate all that you do for the students who will, one day, be in your position: funding the future of our country.